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ABSTRACT

An overview is provided of the issues involved in the development of programs to assess institutional effectiveness, particularly as they relate to California community colleges. After part I reviews the trends that have made institutional accountability a legislative concern nationwide, parts II and III consider various definitions of institutional effectiveness and ways of measuring it. Current practices and problems related to outcomes assessment, "value-added" measurement instruments, and exit testing are explored, the use of multiple measures and classroom-based research is suggested as a means of resolving some of the shortcomings identified with other techniques. Part IV discusses the experiences of states that have implemented statewide assessment initiatives and offers case studies of Missouri's and Tennessee's approaches. Part V addresses faculty concerns about the effects of these programs on students, classroom methods, expectations, and their own role as faculty members. It also underscores the need for teacher involvement in the institutional effectiveness movement. Part VI examines California's position in relation to the movement, focusing on: (1) the provisions of Assembly Bill 1725 that require all community colleges to "phase in" assessment programs; (2) the role of accreditation in implementing the new programs; (3) the unique characteristics of California's community colleges and their students that make the models used in other states inappropriate; and (4) ways of identifying and developing criteria to measure the attainment of each institution's individual goals. (ALB)

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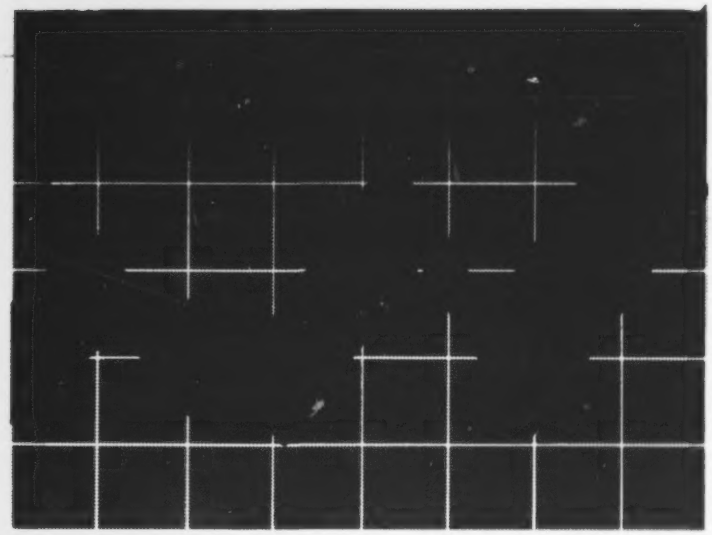

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Institutional Effectiveness Issues for Faculty

by Amy Buckheister

RSC ESL Faculty

February 1989

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rancho santiago community college district

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INTRODUCTION

During the past 20 years, the demographic makeup of community college students has changed dramatically. Student bodies are no longer primarily made up of 18-year-olds, straight out of high school who plan on transferring to a four-year college or university. Instead, students vary widely in age, ethnic background, amount of educational preparation, and educational goals. Many students are less prepared for academic college work than those in generations past. The variety of cultural backgrounds and learning styles is staggering. In addition, many older students are returning to school after years in the work force. And the missions of our colleges have multiplied to fit the changing needs of our student populations. This has created a greater demand on teachers and administrators for new programs and teaching strategies to maintain both educational quality and the "open door."

Another variation that has become more and more apparent is the decline in college resources. Laws such as Proposition 13 in California effectively decreased funding just at the time the community colleges really needed the resources to expand curricula for special-needs students. Finally, the public is increasingly interested in whether its tax dollars are being well

spent in public education.

To find out if the colleges are using their resources in the best way possible and achieving the desired results, legislatures all over the country are demanding that public college systems develop programs to assess institutional effectiveness. This paper looks at the issues involved in this process, particularly for the California system and as they relate to community college faculty.

DEFINITION OF INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Institutional effectiveness is generally assessed, as stated by Peter Ewell, "through the comparison of results achieved to goals intended." This approach requires each institution to identify its mission and goals, design processes to meet them, and then develop both quantitative and qualitative criteria by which its success in meeting these goals can be measured. The results of these measurements can be used in two ways. For accountability, assessment results can be reported to the state legislatures and the public to show the progress of the schools. More importantly, they can be used to help institutions plan and develop further goals. This assessment and planning cycle represents a kind of quality control "feedback loop" for continuous educational improvement.

Many college-wide variables must be measured to provide a complete assessment of effectiveness of the whole institution and to get feedback for program improvement. This feedback can help teachers and administrators deal with the college environment of the 1990's, one which will require a much more varied approach than ever before. For example, a college with a large number of underprepared students might require new support services and faculty development activities.

The following is a description of the effective community college as envisioned by Kay and Byron McClenney, educational consultants in Evergreen, Colorado:

> It has a strong sense of purpose and is shaped by the economic and social needs of its service area. It is student centered, and its effectiveness is measured in terms of both student educational intent and goals achieved. It supports and strengthens the central processes of teaching and learning. Planning, problem solving, and priority-setting are shared between administration and faculty, as is the vision of the college role in the community and society. Its leadership is proactive in forging ahead to set new institutional standards. Finally, the effective community college examines itself with a new emphasis on learning outcomes and results as well as processes and resources (McClenney and McClenney, 1988).

THE ROLE OF ASSESSMENT

To measure institutional effectiveness, some focus on "outcomes assessment," which means the "gathering of concrete evidence about the impact and functioning of

undergraduate education" (Carol Boyer,1988). This involves the consideration of the products of an institution, including student learning outcomes and other impacts which result from student learning.

Goals and Criteria

At a workshop on "Developing Criteria for Institutional Effectiveness" sponsored by Rancho Santiago College in Santa Ana, California in April 1988, major community college functions were identified: general education, transfer education, vocational education, basic skills, student support services, community needs and involvement, and cultural awareness in campus programs.

Carol Boyer, Senior Policy Analyst at the Education Commission of the States and a speaker at the same conference focused upon student learning outcomes including student skills, values, and cognitive abilities, their impact on the community, and their success in transfer school placement and performance. Boyer further narrowed the criteria for assessing student learning to knowledge, college level skills, reading, writing, speech, creative thinking, critical thinking, problem-solving, job-related skills, and attitudes and values regarding their college experience. The above community college functions and criteria of

student learning can be used to identify what should be measured in effectiveness assessment.

Measurement Instruments

The traditional means of measuring institutional effectiveness is that used by the K-12 level: standardized testing after the learning takes place, i.e., "exit" testing. Since student learning was the ultimate goal of education and it was assumed that standardized tests measured student learning, many considered standardized test scores to be adequate measures of effectiveness. But there are problems with using this type of measure exclusively or comparatively. For one thing, outcomes as measured by exit tests are limited in value unless the evaluators also know the starting points of the students. In other words, the "value- added," taking into account pre-test scores, is more informative and comparable than simply the post-test scores, since equivalent post-test scores could represent unequal amounts of knowledge gained (Ewell, 1985). Therefore, many have decided that pre- and post-testing using similar measurements and resulting in "value-added" was the way to assess learning.

Jonathan Warren, former senior researcher at the Educational Testing Service, brings up several objections to the value-added approach. For one thing,

this approach can measure skills such as writing ability and analytical abilities such as reasoning and critical thinking, but it doesn't work well with content courses where students enter with hugely varying preparation, according to Warren. And testing represents only a small part of the whole picture of college outcomes (Warren, 1984). Warren recommends a closer look at graduation rates, transcripts, and even student performance on individual examination questions.

Another problem with testing is that no tests can truly measure the full scope of student learning. Standardized tests are seen by many as extremely reductive of the college experience.

Jean O'Brien of Kings College has another reservation about such program assessment tests: they usually give students no feedback on what they have learned, what they need to improve, or how to improve it (Hutchings and Reuben, 1988). In other words, they do not help student learning. The results, though they may be reported to teachers and show success or deficit, give teachers no idea how to improve their approach either. If real educational improvement is the goal, teachers need more careful consideration of where students are, where they are going, and what their specific learning needs are. They also need better feedback that tells them how to adjust teaching

strategies.

Multiple Measures

Therefore, a preferable, wider approach to measuring the effectiveness of colleges includes the use of many measures to evaluate the college and programs on a "macro" level, along with assessment of teaching strategies and learning in the classroom on the "micro" level. This combination makes more sense to many educators.

Classroom-Based Research

One teacher/trainer who supports the "micro" approach to assessing effectiveness is K. Patricia Cross of U.C. Berkeley. According to Cross (1988), assessment of education can be for two purposes: for accountability or evaluation purposes, or for teaching effectiveness and improvement. The first represents the type of research done by research offices on college campuses. This often includes the use of statistics and interviews and is valuable in showing gains or losses in quantifiable criteria. This information is useful to the public, if well reported, and to the administration for institutional and program-level planning. However, it does not address those individual behaviors of teachers and students in the classroom which may be

modified to maximize learning and effective teaching in that environment. Cross holds that classroom-based assessment is needed to give useful feedback to teachers and to improve student learning since the quality of learning depends directly on the quality of teaching. **This type of assessment, called classroom-based research, involves teachers conducting small-scale studies of the success of a particular lesson in a particular class on a particular day. The results are for the teachers to use for their own information. She warns that this assessment can only work if teachers are willing to use it and if the feedback they get is timely, confidential, and comprehensible by the teacher and aimed at alterable behaviors of either the teacher or the students.**

She considers students to be generally consistent and largely unbiased in their evaluations of teaching, so she urges teachers to take advantage of their feedback (throughout the semester) to improve teaching and learning. Cross and Angelo's handbook Classroom Assessment Techniques (1988) outlines these assessment techniques that simultaneously teach and gather useful information for teachers in adapting techniques to specific classes.

When community colleges are planning their institutional effectiveness programs, it seems wise to

include some of the "micro" classroom-based approach as well as the "macro" institution-wide data. Both are important pieces of the assessment puzzle.

EXPERIENCES OF OTHER STATES

Issues Regarding Organization

State mandates for assessment of higher education have become very popular since 1985. These have sometimes connected eligibility for incentive- or performance-based funding with compliance--using a carrot rather than a stick to get cooperation. Peter Ewell and Carol Boyer (1988) have studied five states with statewide assessment initiatives: New Jersey, Missouri, South Dakota, Colorado, and Virginia. Each of these states has a unique mandate in a unique political and economical climate. In South Dakota and Missouri, scarce resources provided the impetus for assessment, so the colleges became suspicious of assessment as a possible means of further funding cuts. However, in states like New Jersey and Missouri who have "education governors," assessment enjoys political momentum as part of a larger high-priority initiative for education.

There were several problems in the implementation processes of these programs. One was the lack of availability of models other than the past experiences with K-12 grade statewide standardized basic skills

testing programs. So achievement tests still loom large in some assessment programs like those of Texas and New Jersey. Ewell and Boyer see these state programs as "trial balloons" sent up by the legislatures, to be replaced later with programs which better meet everyone's needs.

Three types of institutional response showed up in the face of assessment mandates: 1) those who resisted, 2) those who took a wait-and-see attitude (the majority), and 3) those who responded productively, developing local plans to sell to the states. The most active institutions gave themselves more freedom to shape their own destinies, as states seemed willing to listen to well-sold local programs. In fact, state leaders found silence from the colleges the hardest to manage since they understood that worthwhile assessment initiatives must come from the institutions and their faculties. Now, assessment programs in several places have shown themselves to be useful for many faculty and administrators, providing their own local momentum (Ewell and Boyer, 1988).

Two Case Studies: Missouri and Tennessee

Missouri

Where states have mandated assessment and accountability programs, the types of programs vary with

the needs of the institutions using them. Two such states are Missouri and Tennessee. Since 1975, there has been a value-added assessment and accountability program at Northeast Missouri State University. Here, students are given a wide-ranging testing instrument which measures changes in their affective learning, cultural awareness, interpersonal skills, self-esteem, problem solving, and functioning in the larger society. All students are surveyed at freshman orientation and upon graduation, while a few are surveyed at intermediate points in their education. The program depends on faculty support and involvement, and it has reportedly created an atmosphere of excellence on campus. The program started as a large-scale, "macro" approach to assessment, but the policy of raising teaching consciousness and academic standards has benefited individual students at the "micro" level as well.

President Charles J. McClain considers this type of program a way of demonstrating an institution's comparative worth. He believes national external examinations are the only way to demonstrate an institution's competitive edge over other schools. This opinion is backed up by Governor John Ashcroft of Missouri, Chairman of the National Governor's Association Task Force on College Quality (AACJC Brief, 1988).

Tennessee

Tennessee, on the other hand, has been experimenting with performance-based funding since 1979. Here, colleges assess themselves using several types of measures, including tests, peer reviews, and surveys of students and alumni (Banta, 1988). Assessment data have helped administrations, deans, department heads, and faculty to make needed changes in programs and policies. Examples of such policy changes are reduction of class size in some areas, increased emphasis on advising and orientation, increased faculty involvement in the placement of graduates, and increased written work and hands-on learning opportunities for students. The actual process of faculty involvement in the development of departmental comprehensive exams for majors has given faculty "new perspectives on the nature of the curriculum and the knowledge and skills students should derive from it." It has "increased faculty agreement on learning goals for all students, consistency in teaching core courses, and (created) better links between lower- and upper-division courses." In the final analysis, Tennessee's institutions, as a result of performance funding, have

> (clarified) more specific objectives for student development, communicated these objectives to students, involved students in learning with increased faculty-student interaction and opportunities to apply the knowledge and skills they have acquired in the

> classroom, assessed student progress in attaining these objectives, assessed student satisfaction with their progress and with the process used to promote it, and made improvements indicated by the assessment data.

In conclusion, both of these states have had highly positive results in using assessment plans to create higher standards of excellence and better teacher-student relationships.

FACULTY CONCERNS

Results of Some Existing Programs

Faculty reactions to the idea of accountability, assessment, and particularly classroom research are just now emerging. Pat Hutchings and Elaine Reuben interviewed faculty at colleges with outcomes-oriented curricula (1988). Instructors' concerns centered around students: what they need to know and be able to do and what can be expected of them. They are also concerned about how classroom methods follow from clearer, higher expectations and the roles and responsibilities of faculty in relation to the students, each other, the institution, and society. Teachers have begun to see teaching as a contract between teacher and student. They have become more self-conscious about clearly specifying assignments and their purposes for students. In addition, they are now able to be clearer and more

public about expectations and create even higher ones. Thus, we can see that increased expectations can be set without shutting the open door.

Assessment now focuses faculty more on student performance: not just gathering information, but actually doing something valuable with it. So teachers have changed their instructional methods to reflect this, away from "factual-type" classroom exercises and exams towards reasoning, application, and critical thinking. Faculty now see a need for a range of new strategies to deal with performance-based learning.

The Need for Faculty Involvement

The need for faculty involvement is one of the most important considerations of the institutional effectiveness movement. **It is where the drive for accountability transforms into a mechanism for improving education.** John Petersen, Executive Director for the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges, emphasizes the importance of program effectiveness being demonstrated by the people who actually do the work; faculty must be involved from the ground floor of the process. K. Patricia Cross also believes that teachers are central to this work. She has developed her classroom assessment techniques as a set of suggestions

for teachers--a starting point from which they are encouraged to adapt and develop many more techniques to suit their specific subject-area and student population needs.

Another effort to deal with effective teaching strategies is represented in a handbook for teaching underprepared students developed by a group of faculty from Long Beach City College. Works like these demonstrate the power of tapping the collective wisdom of experienced teachers and teacher/trainers, and of teacher networking, to learn of others' innovations. In other words, our best resource for answers in the midst of a challenging new teaching environment is our own ingenuity. The need is immediate enough that much greater communication between teachers to share ideas is crucial if we are to meet the state mandates before they overwhelm us.

Problems

There is a serious problem that faculty have voiced on this matter. Hutchings and Reuben say that assessment challenges faculty beliefs about what it means to be a faculty member. The imposition of extra faculty responsibilities upon faculty from state mandates outside the institution go against the collective faculty grain, as does the idea of working

with other faculty members to develop collective standards. Institutional assessment policies can make faculty feel as if the administration no longer trusts faculty abilities to teach effectively and evaluate progress accurately with traditional evaluation instruments: grades. Assessment also threatens the unspoken code of instructor autonomy and individual prerogative, values instilled by the profession. Discussion of actual classroom interactions does not come easily for members of the faculty profession. However, as in Missouri and Tennessee, Hutchings and Reuben found that faculty at Clayton University have developed a "shared vision" of education and its goals, contents and processes. This is further evidence that once instructors get past their initial resistance to work closely together, greater faculty cohesion can result along with an awareness that teaching really does matter (Hutchings and Reubens, 1988).

CALIFORNIA

AB 1725 and Accreditation

In California, Community College Reform Assembly Bill 1725 signals the wave of the future. It requires all community colleges to phase in assessment programs demonstrating accountability to the state by 1995. These programs are contingent, however, on state

funding: $7 million in 1988, $70 million in 1989, and up to $105 million in 1990, according to Martha Kanter of the State Chancellor's Office.

Section 71020.5 of Assembly Bill 1725 (AB 1725) clearly states that the Legislature plans to

> foster the creation, implementation, and phase-in of a comprehensive community college accountability system which describes the performance of community colleges in meeting the postsecondary educational needs of students. This...system shall provide data on students, programs, and institutions.

This system is meant to identify educational and fiscal strengths and weaknesses of colleges in order to improve educational quality and promote student success as well as to provide a public report of accountability. The law calls for both quantitative and qualitative measurements of at least these eleven variables: student access, transfer rates, academic standards, student achievement, student goal satisfaction as it relates to their success, course and program completion rates, adequacy of occupational preparation, adequacy of basic skills and ESL courses in preparing students for collegiate work, district fiscal conditions, student satisfaction with services, and the extent to which students and staff proportionately reflect the adult population of the state.

John Petersen states that the term "institutional effectiveness" is gradually replacing "accountability"

in state discussions. He says an explicit institutional effectiveness standard is soon to be written into the accreditation policy for California Community and Junior Colleges. Therefore, accreditation, previously separate from effectiveness issues, will now be the means for implementing new assessment programs. Petersen believes the change should occur gradually over several years so that each institution in the state and its faculty can be involved in defining goals and criteria for their measurement. With this type of creation, effectiveness programs will really take off and work well, he believes.

To Test or Not to Test?

One critical question is how California will create its assessment system. Other states, as we have seen, have varying systems. New Jersey, Tennessee, Florida, and Texas have statewide standardized achievement tests or "rising junior" exams. A benefit of these systems is the comfort of quantitative results and the comparability of different institutions' results for public information.

However, in California, many see this type of statewide testing to be very dangerous at the college level. John Petersen considers statewide testing or any statewide assessment program to be inappropriate. Since

community colleges in California have very different populations and educational purposes, they should not be expected to assess themselves similarly. Petersen recommends a system of locally developed institutional effectiveness assessment programs suiting the missions and goals of each college and its diverse community. Each of these would rely on multiple measures rather than upon simply test results or any single measure.

Grace Mitchell, Vice-Chancellor of Student Affairs at Rancho Santiago College, also feels centralized reporting would be inappropriate. She thinks that groups of institutions working together voluntarily on improving programs is the key here. An example of this is the LARC consortium which has already studied and reported on student outcomes in remedial programs and other areas. She sees these studies and the new matriculation plans as the beginning of the California institutional effectiveness movement.

John Petersen puts it this way: we need to factor an institutional effectiveness consciousness into the structure of California education. This will take time and vary from college to college and department to department, but this is the most practical, affordable way to do it.

Multiple Measures and Effectiveness Consciousness: How Do We Do It?

The next step is to find and develop criteria for each goal the colleges have set and ways to measure them. This is the challenge for faculties and administrations all over the state. As in other states, faculty and administration must work together in this comprehensive assessment effort to improve teaching and learning and to increase public confidence in our institutions. Curriculum reviews, departmental tests and teaching methods evaluations will probably be part of this process, as will other means of program assessment. Research offices and administrations can lead, inform, and suggest possibilities, but any real change in teaching strategies must come from instructors, and if we are to believe K. Patricia Cross, they must be evaluated in the classroom as well. For successful change, the faculty must own the processes as well as the results.

Also, faculty and administration need to find common ground from which to work together towards greater teaching effectiveness and greater responsiveness to the educational needs of each community. At Rancho Santiago College, Chancellor Robert Jensen sees his role in the process as that of raising faculty consciousness and communicating the

value of assessment. But he wants faculty to manage how assessment is to be implemented, giving them authorship and making them partners with administration. He believes postsecondary institutions in California should be able to measure and report to the public how well they meet their stated goals, and he believes RSC has the financial resources to do so. He sees the job at RSC as packaging the large amount of data the Research Office already collects in order to report it to the legislature and to the public, and to identify any gaps in the programs or services at the college. He also sees this process as a means to aid in future planning. Jensen would prefer to work together with faculty now so that "education can be its own catalyst for change," rather than waiting for external forces to demand a change. Rancho Santiago College has taken a big step in leading the institutional effectiveness movement in California. It has invested time and money in related research through the Institutional Research and Planning Office, and it has sponsored statewide workshops on developing institutional effectiveness criteria (one in April 1988, and one being planned for April 1989). Now the Research Office and associated faculty are providing flex activities and workshops in the area of classroom-based research, sharing a set of techniques to help teachers assess student knowledge, attitudes, and

learning, quickly and easily in the classroom. This is institutional effectiveness on the front lines, where it matters most.

CONCLUSIONS

In other states, the act of faculty review of curricula itself has created increased cohesion and higher classroom standards and has resulted in a greater understanding of intended goals among students, faculty, and administrations. With the right amount of administrative leadership and faculty involvement, this, too, can be the case in California. Demonstrating institutional effectiveness, as both the administration and faculty at RSC agree, is necessary to keep the goodwill of those who fund the colleges, and it can also improve education and enhance the faculty profession at the same time. It is the key to college effectiveness and success in the 1990's. The demand from the state for such accountability is not going to go away if we ignore it. Let's move into the future effectively!

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